



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

June 2014

My beloved,

Peace and grace.

Some have asked for more specific instruction on how to practically apply the things written in these letters; so, God willing, in the next two messages, we will discuss love as well as some practical ways to grow in love.

First, I would like to remind you of what our Lord Jesus Christ said when He was asked which is the most important commandment in the law; He said, *“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, before we can begin learning how to grow in love towards one another, let us foremost discuss our love for God.

Let each one ask him or herself this question – do I really love God? It is doubtful any of us would respond with a negative; still, however, is it not possible that there may be something lacking? Yes, we have consecrated our lives to God, but if we were to measure the depth of that love now, how profound would we say it is? How much of our heart is occupied just with God? How much of our soul? How much of our mind? How much of our strength?

Have you ever observed a child say a personal prayer out loud? Would you not say that the child’s heart, soul, mind, and strength are completely immersed in this one prayer? He can think of nothing else, or notice any of the distractions around him – the only and most important thing at that moment is exactly what he is doing. Where would you say your daily devotion is, compared to this child?

I want you to ask yourself this question every evening: how deep is my love for You, God? And then consider the following:

1. Was my heart with God today or did my love meet its limit and become hardened

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 12:29

when a certain thing happened? Did I react with anger when I was reproached? Did I seek honor from man? Did I deny myself for the love of God and do all for the glory of His name, or did I mostly seek to satisfy my ego?

2. Did I devote myself entirely to God or was my soul occupied with possessions and attachments? Was I fully Yours or was I lead by my habits?
3. Where were my thoughts? Did I meditate on You all day? Was I distracted in prayer? Was my mind occupied with negative thoughts about my brethren/sisters?
4. What about my strength? Did I really give all my strength to God or did I seek the comfort of my body? Was I faithful to my task or did I put it off until tomorrow? Did I attend the church services or did I decide to rest instead?

Pray for wisdom and enlightenment so that you may be open to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and answer these questions faithfully, and know, my beloved that the answers to these questions are what you feel is your priority. Then, once you have identified where you have fallen, get up again, but this time with an ardent commitment that, by His grace, you will take a step forward and grow in the area in which you were weakened - even if it is as small as denying yourself a second piece of bread.

The following day, whenever something comes up, you can ask yourself if the way you are about to react fulfills the commandment; do I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength that I will endure, with patience, the trial that has just come my way? Will I say, "I have sinned, forgive me," without explanation? Will I deny my will and my desire for the love of God and seek the comfort of my brethren/sisters before my own? Will I patiently wait on the Lord even if it takes all of what I have?

How deep is my love for You, God? You, who endured the cross to save me, until what point will I endure trials for You? You who sacrificed Your life for me, until what point will I sacrifice for You? Do we say, "Lord, I cannot accept blame or shame; I cannot sacrifice my honor; I cannot deny my comfort and endure injustice; I cannot wait any longer to hear Your voice - I rather defend myself, seek credit and praise, voice my opinion, and accomplish my will"? Or do we say, "Yes, my Lord, I love You with all of me because You first loved me<sup>2</sup> and, with Your Grace, in all circumstances, I will seek Your will, not my own"?

My beloved, never forget that you left the world so you can give all of yourself to God, and also remember that just because you had this intention, it does not mean that you have perfected this sacrifice - no, but rather acknowledge that, through trials, God will daily reveal 'yourself' to you so that you can daily make the choice to give up that part of you, to Him.

Be strong, my beloved and may God empower you to have victory over all that hinders you from growing in His love.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:19